



Sciatica

MU Patient Education Series

Definition:

Sciatica is pain, numbness, tingling and weakness that radiates from your back and down your sciatic nerve. Sciatica is not a condition on its own—it is a sign of another condition. Depending on which condition the sciatica is signaling, the pain and symptoms may vary.

CAUSES:

Your sciatic nerve is the longest nerve in your body, and a very important one! This nerve controls many muscles in your lower legs and supplies sensation to your thighs, legs and feet. Sciatica arises when this nerve is pressured or damaged. Some causes of sciatica include:

- A herniated disk
- Tumors
- Injury
- Piriformis syndrome
- Damaged by a disease such as diabetes

SIGNS/SYMPTOMS:

The key sign of sciatica is pain radiating from your back, to your buttocks, and down one or both legs. This pain can be felt anywhere along the nerve, but it is very likely that you will feel it down this path. Sciatica may be a burning, painful, or tingling sensation. Some other symptoms may include:

- Numbness
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Muscle weakness
- Aggravated pain after sitting
- Pain after coughing or laughing



DIAGNOSIS/TESTS:

When diagnosing sciatica, your physician will likely first conduct a routine physical examination. This will likely show abnormal reflexes, weakness, loss of sensation, and pain. Once sciatica has been confirmed, your physician will then proceed to test for the underlying condition. X-rays, MRIs, blood tests or CT scans may also be performed.

TREATMENT/CARE:

It is difficult to generally treat sciatica because there are a variety of factors that may cause this symptom. In most cases, though, sciatica can be treated at home with self-care measures. Some of these measures include:

- Rest and relaxation
- Lying on a flat, firm surface with pillows under your knees
- Ice packs
- Over the counter pain medications such as Tylenol® or Advil®
- Stretching
- Exercise
- Hot packs
- Physical therapy

There are other treatment measures that require a more aggressive approach, such as steroid injections, prescription drugs and surgery.

PREVENTION:

Depending on the underlying cause of the sciatica, this condition cannot always be prevented. But there are some measures you can take to keep your back strong and healthy. These measures include:

- Exercise regularly
- Stand and sit with proper posture
- Use proper body mechanics
- Rest if you feel your back is bothering you
- Contact your physician with any back-related concerns



CALL YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF...

Sciatica can be a very painful and uncomfortable condition. It is important to identify the underlying cause and treat it before complications arise. It is important to contact your physician immediately if any of the following symptoms begin to accompany your sciatica:

- Worsening pain
- If the self care measures you have taken fail to relieve the pain
- Numbness in the legs or groin
- Weakness
- Loss of bladder or bowel control
- Unexplained fever
- Back pain after a fall
- Burning or blood with urination
- Constant back pain for up to 4 weeks

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